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spot for centuries leads to the formation of kitchen-middens [1]. In the temporary camps something similar happens: the only difference consists in the fact that rubbish dumps only accumulate at the back of the temporary shelters, as a consequence of their peculiar shape that I shall not describe here. These dumps are heaven-sent love nests for insects of many species, mostly flies of a metallic green colour. They follow the Onge from camp to camp and thrive on scraps from human meals. When travelling in Little Andaman I was unmistakably warned of the nearby presence of Onge camps by the appearance of those familiar living beings.

The filth that coats the floors of communal Onge huts offers an ideal breeding ground also for myriads of fleas. Dogs spread them all over Little Andaman. Owing to the fact that the communal huts are deserted for months at a time during the dry season, the fleas become hungry and assault human beings vehemently whenever possible. When visiting empty communal huts I myself, and the persons with me, were plagued by such assaults. Fleas advanced suddenly from feet to head in thick, shimmering brown layers, covering first our legs. We were obliged to strip and douse ourselves with insect-repellents. As for other parasites, including ticks and mosquitos, equally plentiful in Little Andaman, the Onge do not appear to be inconvenienced by them.

The communal huts are used for another purpose as well, unhygienic but of high ethnological interest: the interment of human corpses. When they die, the inmates are buried beneath their beds. In other words, communal huts are also cemeteries. Many human skeletons are found by digging under the beds. Until 1952 this fact was unknown about the Andaman Islanders although it is encountered in all Onge communal huts without exception. An analysis of this custom led to further discoveries: the Onge wish to compel the spirit of a deceased person to remain close to the living as a protection, so they offer it the communal hut for an abode, the idea being that a spirit cannot wander far from the bones of its former body. A series of Onge practices point to this belief: felled enemies must be burned and reduced to ashes in order to render them harmless. Their hostile souls, according to the Onge, rise toward the sky in smoke as the bones are consumed. For the same reason, bones of relatives are fashioned into necklaces. The most conspicuous of these is the *ibidanghe*, worn generally by women and young girls, which is made from a decorated human jawbone. The aim is to obtain the assistance of the departed relation in fighting illness and bad luck. Direction in hunting, fishing and even quarrelling is supposed to come from the dead kept close to the living. We can trace this belief on the connection between bones and souls to a remote origin: Southern Asia megaliths had, in my opinion, no other cause for offering shelter to spirits and promoting useful relations between the living and the dead. I reached this conclusion after studying the contemporary habits of Travancore mountain and other Indian tribes, particularly the Munda. In Nias we find traces of the same customs as among different peoples of Indonesia and Oceania, who

[1] I discussed this at the two international anthropological congresses of 1952 (Vienna) and 1956 (Philadelphia), and have more to say on the subject in my book about the Onge.

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immense quantities of it together with pork. I was with them three times when this recurred, so I could observe their behaviour exhaustively. With their bellies full, the natives rest. Their only activity is body painting, performed by the women on the skin of their peacefully sleeping husbands. Designs change from time to time as I said before, according to the women's inventiveness. Each family challenges the others in renewing their patterns. The best are later reproduced until the next change. From year to year I noticed no real evolution in this rudimentary art, but a cyclical fashion, with temporary preference, in males and females alike, for some geometrical designs, unconnected with whatever kind of food they had been eating. This contradicts the published affirmations of several authors, who allege that the Andamanese paint special patterns in special colours for different kinds of food. There is nothing more false, at least with reference to the Onge. Merry feasting, whether on pork turtle, dugong, fish or honey, leads to a period of rest and body decoration – always in similar patterns and colours – with the unique purpose of preventing illness. We might say that painting the body is equal to cleaning it, but this is quite unintentional. A curious exception to the Onge's filthy habits is the practice of sweeping the floor after solemn banquets in communal huts. The surface of the floor consists of unpacked earth hardened by casual tramping. When it is dry, sweeping raises a heavy dust that fills the hut to the ceiling. It deposits there on the wooden beams where the Onge like to store cooked victuals. So they eat their food, as I said before, coated with dust, no matter how thick. A brush without a handle is used to sweep the floor ; it is 80 cms long and no thicker than a man's wrist. It is one of the nicest tools made by the Onge, and consists of strong, hard, elastic palm fibres bound together with strips of rattan. The dirt is simply thrown out all around the hut, by pushing it under the roof mats that never reach the ground.

These notes offer a first glimpse into a peculiar aspect of Onge life. It is to be deplored that these vanishing people have not yet been exhaustively studied, notwithstanding their anthropological interest and high biological significance.

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Cleaning themselves, to the Onges, means painting themselves to ward off evil and to remove, so they said, the smell of pig fat after the colossal orgies which follow a particularly good hunt, when even they find the stench too much. These orgies, which give them appalling indigestion for days, are followed by an apparently instinctive variation of their diet to raw or cooked vegetable foods. On three occasions from 1952–54 I was present at one of these solemn pork and honey orgies. The Onges ate almost till they burst, and then, hardly able to move, cleaned up by a grand painting session. The women do the painting, families vying with each other to produce weird new designs, which are then copied until the next feast.[1]

Fed and painted, the Onges sit down to smoke, using pipes made from crabs' claws. Still regardless of hygiene the pipes go from one mouth to another, the women smoking just as heavily as the men.

One curious anomaly is that the Onges do sometimes sweep the earth floor of the communal hut. The floor is not deliberately beaten down, but becomes hardened by continuous walking on it; in dry weather it turns to dust, which rises and settles everywhere, especially under the roof, where the lumps of cooked meat, fish and so on are hung. For the cleaning a broom or besom is prepared, well made with very hard, supple, palm fibres, bound tightly and carefully with cords made from reeds. The whole thing is about eighty centimetres long and as thick as a man's wrist.

The dirt is simply swept out all round from under the roof of the hut through the gap between the roof and the ground. In the course of time a ring of refuse builds up round the hut, forming a glorious breeding ground for insects of all kinds. When the hut has to be rebuilt, owing to the ravages of wood-worm and termites, the ring is levelled off to form the new floor. Since the same small, well-chosen site may be used for thousands of years, the hut ends up perching on top of a small mound of refuse dating back to very

[1] From one year to the next I saw no real evolution of art forms but cyclic changes of designs, with a preference for certain geometric patterns, at certain times of the year. Having watched various individuals of both sexes closely over a period of some years I can say that in the Onges at least, contrary to what is generally understood, the use of given patterns, and given kinds of ochre, does not correspond with given types of food. Any feast is always followed by painting, always with the weirdest designs possible, but always geometrical, never far from the current 'fashion', and never even remotely inspired by the basis of the feast.

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ancient times. Great Andaman abounds in these man-made humps, to which the name 'kitchen-middens' has been given, but none are in use today. In Little Andaman, on the other hand, many are still being built up.

The sweeping operations disturb clouds of flies and tiny beetles, light brown in colour, shot with metallic blue, with a highly domed back, and about five millimetres long, which always collect under bones and other human food refuse. Hordes of fleas, invisible in the dirt on the floor but multiplying busily, are also stirred up. Fortunately there are no lice on Little Andaman, owing to the absence of clothing and bed-linen, and the Onges carry no lice in their hair.

In fact the dogs' coats carry the fleas from place to place more than do their naked, smooth-skinned owners. Every time I went into a hut which had been empty for a time, as happens in the dry season when the occupants are away on a hunting trip, I was assailed by swarms of fleas such as I had never imagined! They rushed up one's body from feet to neck in absolute serried ranks, platoons of them, solid masses of tiny black moving objects. The only thing to do was to go out into the open and douse oneself in Flit, which caused them to retreat hastily. My camp-bed was always given a precautionary dose. Unfortunately Flit was not enough to disperse the clouds of ticks, tiny but dangerous, and a scourge in the forests of the Andamans. The Onges call them *anagbe* and thoroughly enjoyed helping to catch them on me in hundreds after every expedition into the forest.

None of these pests worry the Onges, who make no attempt to get rid of them. They leave mounds of filth round their huts or in their forest camps for them to breed in, and the light covering of earth or leaves which at best cover the Onges' faeces, deposited near the camp, was never any deterrent to breeding. The Onges never dig sanitary trenches or prepare any other form of latrines, even for their permanent sites; the forest is all concealing. However, they will never defaecate near, or in, a water course, even when the bed is dry, and when my men used the bed of a dried-up stream for the purpose the Onges protested to me, because the water would be contaminated. I was not disposed to contradict them.

In the forest, meeting a swarm of flies was a sure sign that we